Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food

Farm & Food Report

Communications Branch, Walter Scott Building
3085 Albert Street, Regina, Canada, S4S 0B1

Saskatchewan

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CONNECTING URBAN AND RURAL: FACS LAUNCHES BILLBOARD CAMPAIGN

If you happen to be driving down the highway and see your neighbour's smiling face on a billboard, it's not a mirage – it's the latest campaign from the Farm Animal Council of Saskatchewan (FACS).

Executive Director Adele Buettner says FACS restarted its popular billboard campaign after a five-year hiatus because it is an effective way to spread an important message about agricultural producers in the province.

"The message we are conveying through these billboards is that our producers are responsible, that they care about their livestock," she said. "It's a very positive and a very useful message. We're all about being proactive."

FACS ran billboards every year from 1996 to 2001 before setting the initiative aside for a few years to focus on other projects that required its full attention. However, Buettner says the timing is right to once again let people know about the positive things going on in agriculture.

"With so few people having direct ties to the family farm, we feel it's important to showcase what modern producers look like, to remind people who no longer have that direct link themselves," she said.

"So this year, we're going to feature young, responsible, active Saskatchewan producers who are involved in modern agriculture. It's the first time we've used pictures of actual producers in our billboards, rather than artwork."

The FACS campaign includes six different billboard designs, posted in 16 locations across rural and urban Saskatchewan. Buettner says that's a change from past campaigns, which were focused entirely in Regina and Saskatoon.

The campaign is running throughout the month of May, perhaps stretching into June.

Sponsors for the 2007 billboards are Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food, the Saskatchewan Egg Producers, the North American Equine Ranching Information Council and the Saskatchewan Chicken Industry Development Fund.

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"Our past billboard campaigns were very successful because it was a unique message," Buettner said. "This year is the first time for our livestock industry in the province to collectively have a number of different commodities represented in the billboards. It's not just a beef campaign or a poultry campaign. It's a livestock campaign that brings all these different sectors together and presents them to the public. I think that's a really great message."

The billboards appearing throughout Saskatchewan can also be viewed on the council's website at www.facs.sk.ca.

FACS is a membership-based, non-profit organization that represents the livestock industry in advancing responsible animal welfare, care and handling practices in agriculture. FACS endeavours to raise producer awareness of the economic and ethical benefits of animal welfare, and to help consumers achieve a greater understanding of animal care issues.

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NEW PAINT JOB PART OF MAINTENANCE FOR GRAIN CAR FLEET

The recently announced repainting program for grain hopper cars owned by the Saskatchewan Grain Car Corporation (SGCC) is one part of a multi-phase refurbishment plan aimed at keeping the cars operational for the balance of their useful life span, about another 24 years.

The SGCC was set up in the early 1980s after a shortage of grain cars ended up costing Canada some international sales. At that time 1,000 new grain hopper cars were built by the Government of Saskatchewan. The federal government and Government of Alberta also contributed new cars to the fleet.

According to SGCC Vice President of Operations Kelly Moskowy, the refurbishment program came about after sample inspections of the fleet by AllTranstek, a railway consulting company from Chicago.

"They inspected about 12 per cent of our fleet," Moskowy said. "One of the recommendations that came out is that our cars need to be repainted because of corrosion."

The first phase of refurbishment actually began last year when metal fatigue cracks in the cars were repaired.

"That upgraded our cars from a 260,000-pound gross rail load to 286,000 pounds, allowing us to load an additional 1,000 tonnes of grain on an average 100-car train," he noted.

The repainting program will comprise about 100 grain hopper cars per year, which Moskowy says is roughly the maximum that can be done here.

"Since these cars are owned by the taxpayers of Saskatchewan, we want to paint them in Saskatchewan," he said. "There are only two painting companies that do rail cars in the province, and between the two of them, that's all they can handle given their other commitments."

The main contractors are GE in Regina and Arco Graphics in Saskatoon. It will take approximately eight or nine years to repaint all the cars in the fleet.

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The final phase of fleet refurbishment will take place between now and 2014, when all cars must have automatic slack adjusters installed on their braking systems to comply with new North American standards for rolling stock.

When the SGCC cars are used to move grain to the ports of Churchill, Thunder Bay, Vancouver or Prince Rupert, there is no lease charge included in the freight fees. As a result, it is estimated the fleet has saved producers $50 to $60 million in freight charges since 1981.

The new look for the cars is a background of what is called "Roughrider green," Saskatchewan's official flower, the prairie lily, a yellow stroke emblematic of wheat or canola fields, and the word "Saskatchewan."

Moskowy notes that the new design "is a great way to promote our province across Canada and into the United States."

He says the new colour scheme is actually about $1,500 per car cheaper to produce than the original paint job.

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NATIVE NOVA SCOTIAN CONTINUING RESEARCH ON THE PRAIRIES

Although he lived in Nova Scotia his whole life, Dr. Michael Nickerson had no qualms about moving to Saskatchewan when opportunity knocked.

When a position became available in the Department of Applied Microbiology and Food Science at the University of Saskatchewan, Dr. Nickerson jumped at the chance to continue his research here in Saskatchewan.

He applied to serve as the Saskatchewan Research Chair in Protein Quality and Utilization under the Strategic Research Program (SRP), an initiative funded and administered by Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food. After being accepted, he packed his bags and headed to the Prairies.

Dr. Nickerson's educational background began with a Bachelor's degree in marine biology, concentrating in aquaculture. When he considered attending a graduate program, he came across the Food Science Department at Dalhousie University. It was there that he decided to continue his studies, obtaining both his Master's degree and his Ph.D.

"I started graduate school and, at first ,was interested in the value-added aspects of aquaculture for food. However, I soon realized that I was really interested in food chemistry, so I switched fields completely and adjusted my research direction accordingly," he said. His graduate research focused primarily on both polysaccharides and proteins, looking at how they behave and interact as ingredients in food gels.

Most of Dr. Nickerson's post-doctoral studies have been spent researching ingredient delivery systems developed from plant-based compounds. These systems allow us to deliver a specific ingredient to a specific part of the body (i.e. releasing beneficial bacteria in the small intestine, where it is needed, instead of in the stomach).

Dr. Nickerson is currently administering two main research programs. First, he is looking at the value-added applications of plant protein for food, feed and bio-materials, specifically developing microcapsule delivery systems. These capsules are micron-sized packages made from plant protein specifically for the delivery of bioactive compounds such as flax oil. This will allow food manufacturers to use a stable form of flax oil in a host of recipes and food products.

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Secondly, he is also working to deliver prebiotics and probiotic bacteria as an ingredient for food and feed.

Dr. Nickerson says there is a tremendous push to avoid using animal-based proteins, such as gelatin, in the functional food market. That's where his research comes into play. "The market is encouraging the use of plant proteins as an alternative source for these delivery systems," he stated.

Funding for Dr. Nickerson's research began about six months ago. By September, six or seven graduate students will be working hard in the lab, bringing this technology to the marketplace.

While his work contains a highly technical and scientific element, Dr. Nickerson says it also holds a great deal of relevance for the average producer.

"It's estimated that the functional food market in the global economy will be an industry worth about US$500 billion per year by 2010, three per cent of which is Canadian. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada anticipates producers could potentially realize between $300 million and $1 billion by growing the raw ingredients used to support this industry," he stated.

According to Dr. Nickerson, the current plant protein industry in Saskatchewan is primarily focused on feed; however, his research intends to broaden its use by entering the functional food market.

"I'm taking the protein already extracted from the crop, and then finding value-added applications for those proteins based on their functional properties. The benefit to producers is the opening of new markets, increased product demand, increased prices and price stability," he said.

"As in so many aspects of the Saskatchewan agricultural industry, supporting and investing in value-added opportunities is highly beneficial [to the Saskatchewan economy]."

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BEEF DEVELOPMENT CENTRE FIELD DAY ALWAYS A POPULAR DRAW

The annual summer field day put on by the Western Beef Development Centre (WBDC) is coming up on June 23 at the centre's Termuende Research Farm near Lanigan.

The field day offers a mixture of guest speakers, presentations, displays and tours of current beef and forage research projects and farm facilities.

Paul Jefferson, the Vice President of Operations with the WBDC, says the event is just the latest in a long line of outreach activities the centre has organized to bring people into its facility and tell them about the exciting research work going on there.

"I think the WBDC has had a field day for as long as it's been around, and we've been around for 10 years now," Jefferson said.

He indicated the centre is taking a different approach this year by moving the event from mid-week to a Saturday. "This will allow people – particularly some of the younger producers – who maybe work off the farm or have other commitments during the week to attend," he stated.

"We're trying to give as many people as possible an opportunity to hear about the research and the demonstrations going on here."

A lot of information and activity is packed into the day, but Jefferson says the intent is to provide producers and others in the beef industry with an idea of the research that is currently taking place, as well as some of the interesting findings coming to light that might be useful in their operations.

"Our keynote speaker will be Dr. John MacKinnon, a professor of animal science at the University of Saskatchewan. He's going to talk about the increasing supply of dry distillers grains from the emerging ethanol industry in Western Canada, and how we might be able to use it as a feed resource for the beef industry," Jefferson stated.

Currently, dry distillers grains are used primarily in the dairy sector. WBDC is initiating a project using it as a feed supplement for beef cattle, particularly in conjunction with lower quality forages, to see how the protein benefits can be captured and how the animals respond.

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Other initiatives that will be discussed include a time of calving study, where part of the WBDC's herd was shifted to a June calving date from the traditional March/April timeframe; research on low-cost winter feeding systems; a collaborative pilot project with the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration using a biological digester to remove sulfate from well water; research on using forages in backgrounding and feeding beef cattle; and an analysis of statistics that show a declining yield on Saskatchewan hay fields over the past 25 to 30 years.

"These are all very practical issues facing beef producers and the industry as a whole, so we expect the field day will once again be a very popular draw," Jefferson said.

But he notes that the duration of the field day isn't spent in a chair. "Part of the attraction of this event is that we take people on buses out to some of the field sites so they can see the research activities actually going on in real time," Jefferson stated. "They'll be able to hear from the researchers involved and dialogue with them right on the tour."

Lunch is provided during the field day, and the event wraps up with an optional barbeque steak supper. There is a small charge for both of these meals.

Jefferson says that anyone involved or interested in the beef industry will be able to find some benefit in the WBDC field day. "If you're working in the cow-calf sector, if you're in the feeding or backgrounding aspect of it, if you're in the beef industry at all – you will definitely hear some interesting and useful information during the day."

Registration for the event starts at 9:30 a.m. on June 23, and the program itself begins at 10:00 a.m.

For more information on the WBDC field day, visit the centre's website at www.wbdc.sk.ca, or contact Brenda Freistadt at (306) 682-3139, extension 2.

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RISING TEMPURATURES PUT STORED CANOLA AT RISK

Spring is finally here. But as we are enjoying the beautiful weather, the rising temperatures could be proving detrimental to producers with stored canola.

As temperatures start to climb, spoilage and damage of stored canola can also increase, resulting in lost efforts and revenue.

"We have had a fair amount of damaged seed coming in through the course of this winter to both elevators and crushers. That is in part a reflection of what happened last fall, as well as older seed that producers continued to put into the system," stated David Vanthuyne, an agronomist with the Canola Council of Canada.

"There was a report of a bin, approximately 10,000 bushels in size, that came in with over 80 per cent damage. That bin was essentially worth nothing," Vanthuyne said.

Some producers turned their canola or aerated it in November or December to get the core temperature down to zero. With temperatures back on the rise, the Canola Council advises that it is now important to bring that core temperature back up to 10 degrees Celsius.

According to Vanthuyne, "This will ensure that, over the summer months, the temperature in the core and the outside of the bin is closer together. That way, producers can avoid that variation of temperature within the bin which increases the risk of spoilage."

Some producers may have had an area of canola within their bin that was just on the verge of being too warm going into storage, but held stable. Vanthuyne says that, as the temperature on the outside of the bin increases, hot air travels up the sides of the bin and down through the core. Those areas might now be prone to increasing temperatures that can cause spoilage, such as mould, to continue.

"The process of conditioning is important, since it allows producers to get some air movement into their canola bins through simply turning their canola or aerating, whatever the case may be. That equalizes the temperature and prevents spoilage," he said. "Conditioning is just a natural process of canola."

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Coming into the spring, Vanthuyne points out there is no definite timeline of how long it will take for damage to begin occurring. But producers should be cautious of the ways in which damage can potentially occur and the risks associated with it.

"Throughout the month of May, we are advising growers to turn on their fans for a few days to try to equalize the temperatures within the bins."

Vanthuyne says the best way to measure the current temperature of stored canola is to pull out part of the load and take a sample. If they have temperature sensors within the bins, he suggests the canola will be stable for the summer when it starts to get up above 10 or 15 degrees Celsius.

"Last year, there was not a huge problem in terms of moisture. Canola was dry, but growers often think that dry is safe, which is false. Temperature is just as crucial as moisture."

Vanthuyne says it is important that producers do some of the preparation for canola storage at the beginning of the winter, and then turn that process around coming to the summer months. "With proper storage conditions, canola will be stable and can be stored for up to two or three years."

The Canola Council is making available a Canola Storage Time Chart, which outlines in more detail the risks associated with the rising temperatures and moisture levels pertaining to unstable canola. The chart will be contained in the Canola Growers Manual, which will be posted on the council's website at www.canola-council.org in the near future.

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